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Air Tractor's AT-802 Planes To Be Workhorse for Feds to Help Control Wildfires in 2005

OLNEY, TEXAS – February 22, 2005 – Air Tractor learned today that approximately 50 percent of the Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM) contracts to fight wildfires in 2005 will be issued to the company's AT-802 aircraft.

The popular AT-802F single engine air tanker (SEAT) is unique among air tanker aircraft used in wildfire fighting. It is the only American-made aircraft specifically designed for fighting and controlling wildfires.

Mark Bickham, Aviation Management Specialist and National SEAT program manager for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) said, "The AT-802 continues to provide critical 'close air support' for our ground firefighters when called upon in the initial attack role. We continue to receive excellent performance reports when the AT-802 has been used."

Bickham confirmed that with the most recent "Call When Needed" contracts, the BLM was looking to increase the number of AT-802s from approximately 30 percent to around 50 percent of the available fleet. The AT-802 "Call When Needed" contracts would be increased from the high of 35 aircraft in 2004 to approximately 40 to 45 aircraft in 2005.

Already a workhorse for the BLM and many western states the past several years, the turbine powered 800-gallon AT-802 is being called upon more often to defend against annual wildfires started by nature and man at the federal and state level.

Used throughout the world to fight wildfires, the Air Tractor AT-802F carries fire retardant, foam or water and is well suited to attack and control fires in increasingly populated "urban interface" areas, even in high altitudes and mountainous terrains. Few fires have a chance to catch hold when the AT-802 is launched in an initial attack mode to surgically strike fires in their early stages.

The state of Idaho depends on the high performance AT-802 to protect state and private lands. According to Bob Burke, Idaho Dept of Lands Aviation Program Manager, "We have grown to appreciate the AT-802 here in Idaho." Burke made sure that Idaho was protected by a small fleet of AT-802s the past two years when it was determined that the majority of the heavy air tankers would not get back in service. "The AT-802 is a good fit in our rough terrain supporting ground based resources," Burke said. "We also have shared this resource with the US Forest Service. Having the high performance AT-802 has been a win-win situation for the state and for the USFS."